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March 13, 2002

JURY FINDS SEMINOLE WOMAN GUILTY OF THEFT OF VA BENEFITS

Stasie Ostow, 35, of Seminole, Florida, was found guilty by a jury yesterday in a trial before United States District Judge James S. Moody, Jr.

Ostow was charged in a one-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury on December 11, 2001, with stealing money from the United States and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The charge stemmed from Ms. Ostow's theft of monies being paid under the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Program, the primary purpose of which is to provide support for the widows and widowers and the dependent children of veterans who die in military service or die for service-connected reasons. The Department of Veterans Affairs paid the money into a bank account jointly held by Ms. Ostow and her mother, who was the intended recipient and beneficiary. Ms. Ostow's mother died in 1995. Ms. Ostow failed to notify the VA's benefits office of her mother's death and wrote checks payable to herself against the account for five years. The Department of Veterans Affairs suffered a loss of almost \$43,000.

Ms. Ostow faces a maximum sentence of ten years. The case was investigated by the Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Katherine Ho and Jay Hoffer.